Chinese International Students' Reactions to Tutor Talk: Using Scaffolding Strategies to Support Language Acquisition in the Writing Center

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Abstract

This research contributes to our knowledge about second-language writers and their writing center experiences. This study applies the cognitive and motivational scaffolding coding schema set forth in Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's Talk About Writing (2015/2018) to second-language writers—a student population that was excluded from their study. Drawing on data collected from observations and post-session semi-structured interviews with ten undergraduate Chinese international writers and experienced graduate tutors, this study sought to qualitatively analyze which scaffolding technique was most effective in supporting students' language acquisition. Trends in the results indicate that second-language writers' perceptions of tutoring techniques may be more important than tutors' intentions. Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that second-language writers may perceive tutors' use of sympathy and empathy to be inauthentic. Finally, students' representations of their linguistic self-confidence should impact tutors' choice of scaffolding strategy. The implications for writing center practitioners include utilizing the opening stages of the session to more strategically adapt both verbal and nonverbal scaffolding strategies to the needs of the writer.

> "The essential means humans have of making themselves known is through language. Without control of language, an individual may feel unable to make themselves seen." (13)
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> — Ilona Leki, "Before the Conversation."

The demographics of writing centers have changed with the over one million international students now attending U.S. universities (Institute for International Education). This growth of international student enrollment has affected writing center demographics and impacted the needs of the writers that are using the writing center. Because writing centers provide one-to-one tutorials where a tutor can engage with a writer and their language background, writing centers can be a crucial site for second-language writers' (SLWs') language development and acculturation to U.S. academic expectations (Leki, "Before"). Previous scholarship has demonstrated how a tutorial relationship that emphasizes effective communication and comfort can ease the anxiety about English fluency many SLWs experience (Shukri). Additionally, studies of linguistic self-confidence demonstrate how SLWs' anxiety can impact their perception of their own fluency and competence (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément). Peter MacIntyre, Kimberly Noels, and Richard Clément's findings on linguistic self-confidence may imply that, because SLWs' perceptions of themselves can affect their fluency, SLWs' perceptions of tutors' engagement may also be integral to the effectiveness of a session and to SLWs' language acquisition. Studies such as these led me to design a project that adds to the emerging body of scholarship incorporating the experiences and perceptions of SLWs, so we can better understand writing center strategies that support these student populations.

The rise of international and second-language students at U.S. universities has caused other scholars to think more seriously about how to work with this new population, including a small number of studies that use interviews to elicit these students' views of writing and the writing center. Ben Rafoth, former president of the International Writing Centers Association, stressed the need for tutors to be better prepared to work with international students in his 2015 work on SLWs in the writing center. Writing scholars like Terese Thonus and Ilona Leki have questioned the effectiveness of canonical writing center practices in sessions with SLWs and suggested that administrators should train tutors to work specifically with SLWs so writing centers can better meet their needs (Thonus, "Tutoring," "What"; Leki, "University"). Talinn Phillips' recent study about graduate SLWs expands this call for change in pedagogy to incorporate the "perceived needs" of a SLW on a more individual basis. Yet, it is still rare to find research that directly incorporates the reactions of SLWs and their reception of particular techniques.

A recent writing center publication that is quickly gaining canonical status is Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's *Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors*. Mackiewicz and Thompson have expanded the field of writing center research to include empirical evidence regarding how to categorize scaffolding into separate techniques and how to use these techniques to address writers' individual learning needs (133). Scaffolding refers to a range of tutoring techniques that are used to guide writers

towards a stronger understanding of their writing process and a greater level of independence. In their analysis, Mackiewicz and Thompson categorize tutoring discourse into three subgroups: instruction strategies, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding. Mackiewicz and Thompson themselves acknowledge that they conducted this study without including SLWs in the sample (41) or considering student reception or reciprocity of tutor talk (179-180). Therefore, this study incorporates the voices of undergraduate Chinese international students to better understand their perceptions of scaffolding techniques and these techniques' influence on their self-confidence and language acquisition.

In what follows, I will first review scholarship about writing centers and international students, then I will narrow my focus specifically to Chinese international writers, who comprise the majority of international students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I will share results from an IRB-approved study that adapts the coding schema set forth in Mackiewicz and Thompson's Talk about Writing to the context of SLWs in the writing center. I will conclude with the conceptual and practical implications of my main finding that a SLW's perception of a scaffolding technique and of their own fluency level may be more important than a tutor's intentions. I suggest that tutors need to be fluid in their pedagogical approach, utilize the opening stage of a session effectively, pay attention to students' reception of a technique and perception of themselves as writers, and create a comfortable tutorial environment. Overall, my results contribute to writing center scholars' understanding of how tutors can be more strategic about the techniques they employ to make SLWs more comfortable within sessions and more confident in their fluency and writing ability.

Writing Centers and International Students

Writing center sessions with SLWs have been proven to assist with both writing and overall language acquisition (Leki, "Before", "University"; Fraiberg, Wang, and You; Yan and Berliner). Often, sessions with SLWs are integral to their development as both English speakers and English writers due to the individualized attention they receive in the writing center that they may not receive from professors or teaching assistants (Yan and Berliner; Leki, "University"). Kun Yan and David Berliner's study on the causes of graduate Chinese international students' anxieties included interviews that revealed how relationships between faculty and students are strained by language barriers. As one participant recounted,

> The limited command of English negatively affects my academic performance. The first semester, my advisor even suggested that I quit the doctoral program. He said that he did not see any potential from my papers.

Writing becomes even more complex for SLWs when they are presented with the challenges of inadequate teacher feedback, or when they encounter what Lee Anne Carroll calls "faculty fantasies," or misconceptions that "students ought to know 'how to write' before they get to college" (26) and that writing centers are correction centers (8). Though SLWs may experience unsupportive interactions with instructors, scholars have identified that quantity and quality of social and cognitive interaction is associated with linguistic self-confidence (Wong). This finding suggests that SLWs' anxieties can be eased, and their writing performance and confidence improved, through less stressful classroom environments (Shruki) and making full use of the writing center (Williams and Takaku).

SLWs' anxiety about being understood is directly related to their perceptions of their writing and their confidence in their own fluency; therefore, students' perceptions of their writing in a non-native language is as relevant as the writing skills themselves. In their work on linguistic self-confidence, MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément have discussed how SLWs' anxieties can affect their self-ratings of competence in literacy tasks. The results of their study demonstrated that anxious students did not "perceive their competence to be as high as a more objective analysis reveal[ed] it to be;" whereas relaxed, or more confident, students tended to overestimate (278). Their results also show that overestimating one's fluency may actually facilitate language learning, while low self-confidence impairs progress (279). In previous studies, motivational scaffolding has been defined as a major factor in achieving comfort for SLWs in writing center sessions (Thonus, "Tutoring"). As such, motivational scaffolding's fundamental focus on a student's affect may be a way improve SLW linguistic self-confidence and language acquisition.

Chinese International Students

Nearly one-third of international students originate from China, and they are the majority by a large margin (Institute of International Education). Given the large number of these students in U.S. universities, several writing scholars have studied the specific anxieties and needs of this population (Fraiberg, Wang, and You; Heng; Nan; Severino and Prim). While writing assignments can pose challenges to any SLW, they pose

unique challenges to Chinese international students, whose writing conventions differ significantly from the U. S. writing curriculum. Tang Heng describes why Chinese international writers tend to struggle with the shift to U.S. academic writing styles, comparing Chinese writing conventions that emphasize elegant style, including proverbs and inductive argumentation, with the linear, logical process of U.S. writing conventions that emphasize original thought and critical thinking. Heng is an education scholar who has studied the Chinese population and argues previous research involving both graduate and undergraduate Chinese international students is incomplete and does not encompass the entirety of students' experiences in the U.S

Research that incorporates both Chinese international students and the writing center is even more incomplete. A notable exception is Frances Nan's "Bridging the Gap: Essential Issues to Address in Recurring Writing Center Appointments with Chinese ELL Students," though Nan relies mainly on theorizing how to adapt to the needs of Chinese international students without including the voices of these students to substantiate her claims. Another exception is Carol Severino and Shih-Ni Prim's work with online tutoring, Chinese writers, and tutors' approaches to common errors. They have produced a comprehensive survey to gauge Chinese writers' experience with English writing as well as demonstrated how monolingual tutors without a better command of the English lexicon may have trouble correcting nuanced grammar errors.

Writing is a component of adaptation to a new culture as well as language acquisition, and the conventions of the target language can also affect the ways students speak, think, and exist in the world (Fraiberg, Wang, and You 87). Steven Fraiberg, Xiqiao Wang, and Xiaoye You address the role writing centers can play in SLWs' adaptation to a new culture in their discussion of guanxi networks, a Chinese cultural system of building and maintaining relationships. The idea of the guanxi network is important in understanding the role tutors play in Chinese students' lives outside of the writing center as well as in their journey with language acquisition in general. If the writing center can create a sense of comfort and build a relationship with these writers, it can significantly influence Chinese students' anxiety and confidence in their English fluency. Research that examines language acquisition in postsecondary academic settings indicates that, like many international students, Chinese international students have high anxiety levels, but their anxieties are often overlooked because they tend to continue to achieve academically (Heng; Yan and Berliner). It is therefore especially important for Chinese international students to have a support system, like the writing center, that eases their anxieties while they are working in a new language.

Though Mackiewicz and Thompson cite research about motivation in Talk about Writing that involved second language, as well as Asian-specific, writers, in their conclusion they acknowledge that the application of scaffolding techniques with SLWs contains obstacles that they have not considered (41). They also recognize that their study lacks the inclusion of student voices (179-180). The writing center has a unique opportunity to influence SLWs' language acquisition, yet we know little about how tutors can use scaffolding techniques to support this process. As such, it is possible that the framework Mackiewicz and Thompson created in their study is subject to change when applied to the context of writing center sessions with SLWs.

Methods

In this study, I sought to better understand the experiences of undergraduate Chinese international writers in the writing center and how scaffolding techniques can influence language acquisition. Like Mackiewicz and Thompson, I analyzed ten writing center conferences involving undergraduate writers and experienced graduate tutors; however, the undergraduate participants of this study were Chinese international students. I gathered data through session observations and post-session interviews. The sessions I observed occurred within the Writers' Workshop on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus, which conducts over 6,500 one-to-one tutorials a year. During the year of this study, 32.5% of those tutorials were with undergraduate international students, of whom 55.6% were Chinese. The Writers' Workshop employs about 50 tutors a semester, the majority of whom are graduate students. All tutors who participated in this study were graduate students with at least one semester's experience. During their orientation and bi-weekly professional development meetings, tutors learn about second language writing acquisition (e.g., Ferris; Leki, "University"), recommended practices for tutoring second language writers (e.g., Bruce and Rafoth; Harris and Silva; Thonus, "Tutoring," "What"), and scaffolding strategies (Mackiewicz and Thompson, "Motivational"; Nordlof).

I decided to focus on collecting qualitative data only, despite that Talk about Writing involved both qualitative and quantitative data, to better understand the perspectives and feelings of undergraduate Chinese international writers. I wanted to focus on students'

reactions to techniques, rather than draw conclusions from my observations. This decision was inspired by Diana Bell and Madeleine Youmans's work with SLWs and tutors' use of politeness strategies, where they theorized how tutors could tailor their approach to consider the needs of these writers but did not collect data that would allow them to consider students' perception of and reactions to these techniques. Additionally, I was strongly influenced by what Shanti Bruce says in her qualitative work with SLWs: "[T]alking with ESL students directly about their needs and experiences made my own study of abstract theories and pedagogical practices come alive" (218). I developed my post-session interview protocols with this previous research in mind, in the hope that I can contribute to writing center scholarship in a way that incorporates the voices of students and their perceptions of tutoring techniques. While this study does not aim to be representative or generalizable, its findings may be relevant to other large, public research universities that have also seen growth among Chinese international students.

I personally observed each of the ten sessions, which lasted fifty minutes on average. I took field notes to record specific instances of tutors' use of scaffolding techniques and my own observations. I tailored semi-structured post-session interviews to each individual session. I recorded each interview, then transcribed it later. I started each interview by asking about how these writers would rate their own English fluency, as well as what specific parts of writing they felt they did well or struggled with. This process allowed me to gauge the participants' linguistic self-confidence, and its effect on their preferences, rather than their objective fluency level. The semi-structured interview allowed me to adjust my questions to be applicable to the individual session. I included questions about whether a student was visiting the writing center for the first time, whether a student had worked with the same tutor before, what specific assignment the student was working on, and which scaffolding techniques were present during a session. I referenced specific examples of when tutors had used techniques in order to prompt a better understanding of what I was asking. For example, some of the questions I asked included,

- How did you feel when the tutor said they also struggle with being concise?
- How did you feel when the tutor said that the changes they were recommending were suggestions?
- How did you feel when the tutor gave you feedback by discussing your intentions with a sentence?

To analyze the interview data, I used the coding schema developed by Mackiewicz and Thompson in Talk About Writing to better understand how students experienced cognitive and motivational scaffolding. Mackiewicz and Thompson's framework includes definitions of instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding techniques. Instruction strategies are when a tutor attempts to convey information to students using negative politeness strategies and directive tutoring, for example telling, suggesting, explaining and exemplifying (33). Cognitive scaffolding strategies are used to encourage thinking about content and inspire better understanding and development of the writing process, which includes pumping, reading aloud, responding as a reader or listener, referring to a previous topic, forcing a choice, prompting, hinting, and demonstrating (36). Motivational scaffolding techniques aim to build and maintain rapport, a sense of solidarity, and increase a student's motivation. Motivational scaffolding techniques include showing concern, praising, reinforcing a student writers' ownership and control, being optimistic or using humor, and giving sympathy or empathy (43). The following are extended definitions of the techniques that proved most relevant to my study, taken from Talk about Writing (Mackiewicz and Thompson 36; 43):

1. Pumping: when a tutor withholds "advice or part of an answer," asks leading questions, and requires response from students.
2. Responding as a reader or listener: when a tutor reads a section, then tells the student what they take away as a reader or paraphrases what a student is saying.
3. Showing concern: when a tutor "build[s] rapport with students by demonstrating that they car[e]," such as when they check in with a student's understanding or emotional well-being.
4. Praising: when a tutor points to a student's successes with positive feedback
5. Reinforcing student writers' ownership and control: when a tutor "increase[s] student writers' developing self-regulation and self-efficacy by asserting that the student writer ultimately mak[es] the decisions."
6. Being optimistic or using humor: when a tutor "reduce[s] student writers' anxiety with light-heartedness and buil[ds] confidence by

asserting a student writer's ability to persevere in the task."

7. Giving sympathy or empathy: when a tutor "expresse[s] their understanding that the task was difficult."

Results

I observed ten tutoring sessions involving graduate tutors and undergraduate Chinese international SLWs and conducted post-session interviews to better understand the role of the writing center in SLWs' confidence and language acquisition. The ten undergraduate Chinese international students who participated in this study came from a variety of majors and varying levels of self-reported English fluency. About half of my participants were working on course papers and the other half were revising personal statements for graduate school. Five of these students were female and five were male. More specific information about the students can be seen in Appendix.

My analysis of interviews with the ten undergraduate Chinese writers revealed four major trends: 1) The motivational scaffolding technique of praise tended to be preferred by students who perceived themselves as less fluent and cognitive scaffolding techniques, like pumping and responding as a reader, tended to be preferred by students who perceived themselves as highly fluent. 2) Motivational scaffolding and cognitive scaffolding were complex in practice, and often these techniques overlapped to guide students to their own solutions while establishing consideration for students' emotional well-being. 3) Scaffolding extended beyond verbal techniques to nonverbal techniques, such as patience, that tutors used to create an environment of comfort for SLWs. 4) Sympathy and empathy may not have been interpreted by SLWs as the tutor intended.

Students' Self-Reported English Fluency and Preference for Scaffolding Techniques

Similar to MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément's study on the biases of self-evaluation, self-reported fluency in the context of this study acted as an indication of SLWs' linguistic self-confidence. Praise was the technique preferred by writers with lower linguistic self-confidence, whereas more confident writers preferred cognitive scaffolding techniques, like pumping and responding as a reader. Writers with lower linguistic self-confidence typically had writing concerns about grammar and clarity—meaning their primary focus was making sure that their audience would be able to comprehend what they intended. Suyin and Zhang, both freshmen, self-reported lower English fluency and identified praise as the technique that made them feel the most confident and comfortable writing in English. Lin, a junior who also self-reported low levels of English fluency, did not refer to praise as the technique that made her most comfortable, but specifically mentioned that praise made her feel like she did a good job.

Suyin reported that attempts to reinforce her ownership or use cognitive scaffolding made her feel even more insecure about her writing. She explained that her primary concern was reader comprehension and that she felt uncomfortable when the tutor used questions to prompt her to come to her own conclusions about what needed to be revised in her essay. When the tutor asked questions, such as "what did you mean by that?", Suyin said she felt anxious "because I don't know if my teacher can understand my writing." Suyin said she would rather be affirmed about what she is doing well, because it meant that the tutor could understand her writing and that her professor might as well. Specifically, Suyin said that she felt "safe" when the tutor mentioned how she was constructing sentences well.

Zhang expressed similar feelings about praise. He was aware of the tutor's attempts to reinforce his ownership and provide cognitive scaffolding. He mentioned specifically that it was beneficial that the tutor had led him to talk about his own intentions, because it would allow him to apply similar logic to future writing. However, praise made him feel much more confident about his writing: "she pointed out there a lot of points that she thinks I did well, so that just makes me feel really good."

Praise was still somewhat appreciated by more confident writers, but not always. Jian, a senior, mentioned that praise made him feel excellent, but he was more focused on improvements he could make on his paper. Likewise, Hong, another senior, remarked that the praise was nice to hear, but she did not feel strongly about the technique beyond that. At the close of the session, the tutor working with Chaunli, a senior working on a personal statement, engaged in praise. The tutor said that the ideas of Chauli's personal statement were good and that Chaunli was in a good place to move forward. However, Chaunli did not regard this praise highly because he did not feel as though he deserved to be praised, saying:

> **Chaunli**: "Okay, honestly, I think that everyone might say that, that every [tutor] would compliment their students, that's very common, I wouldn't regard that as praise because I don't think I did good enough. I don't know if they really think that way."

Interviewer: "So it's less valuable for you because you're not sure if it's genuine or not?"

Chaunli: "No, it's, no I think they are genuine. I just don't regard what he said as praise because of how I feel."

When writers with higher linguistic self-confidence reflected on which scaffolding technique made them feel most comfortable, they favored cognitive scaffolding techniques like pumping questions and responding as a reader. These students valued the ability to come to their own conclusions and felt as if they were making progress in the writing process. Jian liked that he was not being told what to do; rather that the tutor let him develop his own thoughts and prompted him to explain those thoughts in more detail. Pumping was also the most valuable technique for another more confident senior, Chang, because she found it allowed her to learn the most about writing. Chaunli expressed that talking about his ideas with the tutor gave him a better sense of what he wanted to say, as well as how his writing was being received by an audience. He cited both the pumping questions and responding as a reader:

> I think [the technique that made me most comfortable] might be the conversation, yeah, because the conversation is like, like, more me talking about my document and at the same time he gave me some of his feedback, so it's kind of like a win-win. For me, I kind of understand what I'm writing, and for him he gives me the feedback on what he thinks works.

Hong mentioned that she liked that the tutor did not edit the paper but tried to understand Hong's intentions and assist her to meet those intentions: "[The tutor] doesn't just edit [themselves], but [tries] to understand what I'm trying to say and what I'm trying to do."

Students with higher linguistic self-confidence were more concerned with style and improving their writing process, rather than with being affirmed that their writing was understandable. These writers wanted to learn skills that would be applicable to other writing assignments. For this reason, Chang preferred cognitive scaffolding techniques: "First, I think [discussing my intentions is] the most useful part for the personal statement, and also it's the part I can learn most from."

The reactions of writers in this data set did not follow a simple pattern—writers with different levels of confidence did not always prefer the same respective techniques as other writers who rated themselves the same way. Writers who rated their fluency level as average sometimes also preferred cognitive scaffolding, which implies that an individual's perception of their writing and their fluency affects their receptions of scaffolding techniques.

Overlap of Scaffolding Strategies: Pumping to Show Concern

Cognitive scaffolding refers to a range of tutoring strategies that elicit critical thinking and guide students to develop their own solutions to problems. When put into practice, cognitive scaffolding techniques often overlap with the emotional component of motivational scaffolding and contribute to a SLW's sense of being understood. The overlap of motivational with cognitive scaffolding became apparent in Bao's interview. Bao was a freshman who expressed that the tutor's clarifying questions about the assignment parameters had led to a discussion of her intentions and argument:

Interviewer: "So then, when he asked you clarifying questions about the parameters of the assignment and what the prompt was asking you to do, how did that make you feel?"

Bao: "Well, it's actually like, difficult to explain the concept of philosophy to others, especially those who don't know about the concept before, but it's actually, like, help me to, like, know better what I'm going to argue for, by retelling others my thoughts or outlines."

Interviewer: "When would you say that when he asked you these questions and you had a discussion about [your intentions], that made you more confident about what you were talking about?"

Bao: "Yeah it makes me feel more clear about my argument."

While other participants expressed similar experiences where a tutor's concern for a writer's affect overlapped with prompting the writer to reflect on content, Bao's interview was the clearest representation of this overlap. In other words, the motivational scaffolding technique of showing concern, demonstrated by the tutor's clarifying questions, overlapped for Bao with the cognitive scaffolding technique of pumping. The emotional component of this overlap was enforced by the way these techniques were received by students. Though they were received as cognitive scaffolding techniques that prompted discussion, students also found these techniques to be representative of tutors' efforts to understand their needs. The students' explanations for why a particular

technique was most effective in creating comfort were primarily related to the tutor's effort to understand them, their writing, their intentions with that writing, and their intentions in a writing center session.

Patience, Nonverbal Scaffolding, and the Learning Environment

My study extends Mackiewicz and Thompson's definition of motivational scaffolding techniques by acknowledging the presence of nonverbal strategies that tutors used to create an environment of comfort for SLWs. SLWs reported that tutors achieved this environment through projecting an attitude of patience. Similar to praise, patience was preferred by students with lower linguistic self-confidence. In the same way students with lower self-confidence wanted to be affirmed with praise, because it confirmed that their writing was comprehensible, patience was a nonverbal way to demonstrate a tutor's efforts to comprehend a student during the session. Patience, as defined by the participants of my study, manifested when a tutor gave the student processing time and demonstrated their effort to understand the student's intentions and to maintain the integrity of the student's paper. Both Lin, a junior, and Mei, a senior, preferred patience over other scaffolding techniques for this reason. Lin mentioned that the tutor's patience made her feel comfortable, because it showed that the tutor wanted to be talking with her. It also made her feel like she had time to listen and understand his suggestions: "because I feel like if people are not patient with me, they might be like 'I don't want to talk with you' and I need to be able to listen to his suggestions." Mei more explicitly reported that the tutor's patience made her feel comfortable. Unlike Lin, however, Mei mentioned that the tutor's patience allowed her to take the time to think about how she was going to reply to the tutor's questions and better articulate what she wanted to say.

Yet, writers with low self-reported English fluency were not the only participants who mentioned patience. Both Bao, a freshman who rated her fluency as average, and Chang, a senior who rated his fluency as high, specifically referred to patience. Bao mentioned that patience was how she would define the tutor's attitude and that patience was important to her in a session:

> I feel like he is very, like, patient when hearing me explain the concept and he really takes time to understand and repeat to make sure he really understands what I'm going to say, what I'm going to discuss in my paper.

Chang expanded on Bao's feelings about patience to connect it to SLWs' ability to comfortably express themselves:

> **Chang:** "Yeah so first, first it's that they [the writing center] help me a lot, like all the people here are really patient and also every time it gives me a clear thought about, like, about what to work on."
>
> **Interviewer:** "So, when you say everyone here is really patient, why do you think that's important for you?"
>
> **Chang:** "Um, because, yeah, it sometimes take[s] time to explain things to people when . . . when English is your second language."

Patience seemed to be linked to motivational scaffolding in the way that it functioned as a nonverbal demonstration of tutors' concern for writers' comfort. For writers like Chang, a learning environment defined by patience was mentioned explicitly as a reason for their return to the writing center.

Perceived Inauthenticity of Sympathy and Empathy

Though Mackiewicz and Thompson acknowledge that demonstrating sympathy and empathy rarely occurred in their data, they include it as a component of successful sessions. However, the reactions of one participant in my study raises questions about the effectiveness of these strategies with second-language students. Sympathy and empathy only occurred once in my data set, and, in that instance, did not function the way these strategies may have in a session with a native speaker. It is important to understand linguistic differences before attempting to practice empathy, as Chen's session demonstrated. In the session, a tutor attempted to empathize with Chen's concern of being concise, but Chen, a freshman, did not feel like the tutor understood his struggle as a SLW.

> **Chen**: "Like when I write things from Chinese, I, like, have to do the same thing. Every time I write my paper, I have to do a lot of things and then I have to do a reduction, because, like, that's the reason I feel like using a second language to write about things makes me be more detailed. And, I know there's a lot of mistakes that I make in the entire text, so I do it as more as possible, and then I do a reduction to limit my mistakes. So, when she talks about how she has the same problem as I do, I was like, like, what?"
>
> **Interviewer**: "Because it's not really the same problem."

Chen: "Yeah."

Chen's response implies that monolingual tutors' sympathy or empathy may not function as intended for second-language students. The empathy may be perceived as inauthentic. Though native-speaking tutors and SLWs may seem to have the same general concern about their writing, the composition process is much different.

Implications

Through observations and semi-structured post-session interviews with ten undergraduate Chinese international writers, I attempted to identify trends that would reveal how scaffolding techniques supported language acquisition for SLWs during a one-to-one writing session with an experienced tutor. My analysis of the interviews revealed four major trends. The first was that writers with lower linguistic self-confidence generally preferred praise, while writers with higher linguistic self-confidence generally preferred cognitive scaffolding techniques. The second was that cognitive and motivational scaffolding techniques are more intertwined than Mackiewicz and Thompson's schema might suggest. The third was that the nonverbal scaffolding technique of patience could be used to create a sense of a safe learning environment that allowed SLWs to feel comfortable. The fourth was that sympathy and empathy do not always function as the tutor intends when applied to a context with SLWs. The practical implication of these results suggest that tutors need to be fluid in their pedagogical approach, utilize the opening stage of a session to determine the needs of a SLW, be aware of a student's reception of a technique, and create a comfortable environment through nonverbal scaffolding. The conceptual implications suggest that more research should incorporate students' voices to enhance tutors' understanding of how SLWs receive canonical techniques that are successful with native speakers.

One of the driving goals of my study was to better understand how tutors can alleviate SLWs' anxiety and facilitate language acquisition. Like in MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément's work on linguistic self-confidence, in this study, a student's sense of their ability to be understood manifested in their self-reported fluency. In this way, self-reported fluency acted as a measure of student linguistic self-confidence. Writers with different confidence levels expressed preferences for different techniques. SLWs with lower self-confidence may feel judged based on their identity on the page, or how fluent they appear to be based on their writing, a concept that has been explored by Yan and Berliner's study on graduate Chinese international students' sources for anxiety. As suggested by Thonus ("Tutoring"), the motivational scaffolding technique of praise functioned to alleviate the anxiety of these SLWs. This finding is also consistent with MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément's assertion that more anxious and less confident students should stop underestimating themselves in order to improve, which suggests that motivational scaffolding is a key tool in building confidence. In practice, tutors can use praise to confirm that SLWs' writing can and will be understood. Conversely, SLWs with higher confidence may be thinking of themselves more as scholars, especially because many of the participants of this study with higher linguistic self-confidence tended to be upperclassmen preparing for graduate school. As such, their writing concerns tended to be more in regard to style than clarity, and they preferred cognitive scaffolding to praise. The finding that more confident SLWs were not primarily seeking affirmation in writing center sessions correlates with Mackiewicz and Thompson's conclusion that tutors should address both students' comfort and the quality of their draft ("Motivational" 40). Since SLWs with high self-confidence may already be comfortable, tutors could rely more on cognitive scaffolding to meet the needs of these writers. Overall, this result suggests that a writer's perceptions of themselves and their fluency can affect what tutoring technique is going to work for them.

In order for a tutor to decide which technique or combination of techniques will best allow these writers to achieve their goals for the session, they need to elicit SLWs' goals, linguistic self-confidence, and background. This finding corroborates Nan's conclusion that meta-talk, the small talk that occurs in the opening stage and allows a tutor to get to know a student, might be a way for tutors to better address the concerns of SLWs (58). The "opening stage" takes place at the start of the session, lasts around five minutes, and gives the tutor the opportunity to ask questions, get to know a writer, their background, and their assignment better. This moment is especially important when working with SLWs, because it also gives the tutor an opportunity to gauge the student's perceptions of their writing, of their confidence, and their comfort writing in English. For instance, in this study, the tutor working with Chaunli devoted significant time to understanding how he felt about his personal statement, the program he was applying to, whether he had written a statement like this before, and his background in general. Chaunli said that this conversation made him feel like the tutor could understand what he was struggling with and what he hoped to gain from the session. Yet, Thonus found that

the opening stages tend to be short or skipped altogether in sessions with non-native speakers ("What" 236-237). Rather than ignoring the opening stage or merely using it to create rapport between the tutor and student, tutors should utilize the opening stage to ask SLWs about their background, their confidence, and their comfort to determine the proper techniques that will meet the needs of the writer.

Not only do we need to attend to the voices of students in our sessions, but we need to incorporate them in our research as well. While Mackiewicz and Thompson's goal was to create a theoretical framework for categorizing tutorial talk, my study calls aspects of this framework into question and suggests that students' reception of techniques matters. The finding that cognitive and motivational scaffolding overlapped in actual sessions emphasizes how students may receive techniques differently than a tutor intends. This finding also confirms Thompson's assertion in her microanalysis of scaffolding that "although cognitive and motivational scaffolding differ according to the verbal and physical moves tutors make, their effects on students are likely more difficult to separate" (445). In Bao's session above, for example, while the tutor intended to use the motivational scaffolding technique of showing concern, the student received it as the cognitive scaffolding technique of pumping. Therefore, my research confirms the difficulty of separating cognitive and motivational scaffolding in practice and asserts that what matters more than the classification of techniques is the student's perception and reception of a technique.

Additionally, though Mackiewicz and Thompson acknowledge that sympathy and empathy rarely occur in sessions, when it does occur SLWs may perceive sympathy and empathy differently than native-speaking students. In this study, Chen revealed that the monolingual tutor's empathy seemed inauthentic. Though both the tutor and writer may have struggled with the same general problem when writing, there are clear differences in the writing process between native and SLWs. This example further emphasizes that the success of tutoring techniques depends on the student's reception rather than the tutor's intention. Given how infrequently these strategies occurred in both my and Mackiewicz and Thompson's data set, future research should specifically analyze the role of sympathy and empathy and its dynamics between sessions with SLWs and non-native speakers.

Patience was perceived as a nonverbal demonstration of tutors' efforts to understand SLWs' intentions and preserve the integrity of their paper, which demonstrates that another limitation of Mackiewicz and Thompson's framework is the emphasis on tutor talk, when other nonverbal strategies might contribute to experiences of success. Nonverbal scaffolding techniques have been explored by Thompson in the past; however, scholarship on nonverbal scaffolding techniques is limited. Thompson's microanalysis of scaffolding in a writing center session focuses mainly on hand gestures. Her focus seems to suggest that nonverbal techniques are supplemental to verbal scaffolding techniques, whereas my research suggests that nonverbal techniques function foundationally to establish a comfortable tutorial environment. In particular, four of the ten undergraduate Chinese international students who participated in this study emphasized that the nonverbal technique they described as patience created an environment of comfort and safety. Participants also indicated that their experience of patience determined their likelihood of returning to the writing center. Returning Chinese international writers develop a relationship with both a tutor and the writing center, which can be integral to SLWs' language acquisition and linguistic self-confidence (Williams and Takaku). This relationship also calls back to the idea of guanxi networks and how the writing center can affect not only a student's writing ability, but the way that they interact with and within a new culture (Fraiberg, Wang, and You). By focusing on the way their techniques are received, individual tutors and the writing center can create a comfortable environment for SLWs and provide a foundation for an ongoing relationship that facilitates language acquisition.

More conceptually, the trends revealed in my study demonstrate the importance of students' perceptions of their linguistic ability and of the tutorial interaction. In this way, my results confirm Thonus's assertion that students' "perceptions of the tutor's role . . . create and modify the context of interaction" ("Triangulation" 61); however, my research includes a more expansive assessment of students' perceptions, to include their reception of tutorial techniques and their linguistic self-confidence. Writing center research tends to focus on the researcher's assumptions of a student's perception based on observation (Babcock et al.; Thonus, "Tutor"). As such, my research should serve as a continuation of the call for more research that integrates students' voices.

Conclusion

The trends revealed in my interviews with ten undergraduate Chinese international writers suggest that more writing center research should incorporate both

the presence and voices of SLWs. Though this study specifically considered the reactions of Chinese international students, many of the implications for practice could be applied to a range of SLWs. The trends also suggest that researchers should examine nonverbal scaffolding techniques, beyond those that are supplemental to verbal scaffolding techniques. Further research should consider the way that nonverbal scaffolding techniques can structure a learning environment. The results of the study are somewhat limited because the data was collected over a relatively short period (two semesters) and is therefore unable to fully include the development of SLWs from low linguistic self-confidence to high linguistic self-confidence. A longitudinal study on the linguistic development of SLWs throughout their college career, as well as how the techniques that they prefer fluctuate with this development, would help us better understand the role of the writing center and scaffolding in SLWs' confidence and language acquisition. This study is also limited in its consideration of class standing. Another direction for future research would be a quasi-experimental design that compares the linguistic self-confidence of freshmen and senior SLWs to better gauge relationships between class standing, linguistic self-confidence, and preferred tutoring techniques. (However, given the complexity of students' linguistic backgrounds, class standing may be an imperfect representation of the length of time students have been writing in English.) Additionally, students' perceptions of the inauthenticity of certain motivational scaffolding techniques raises questions for future scholars about students' reception of tutorial techniques.

The results of this study can be applied beyond theory to real-world writing centers by better equipping them to meet the needs of SLWs. A recent Praxis publication on how flagship universities in the U.S. market the writing center concluded that SLWs need high-quality writing services the most, but these universities "do not appear to provide these services or make these services apparent on their websites" (Taylor 6). Therefore, writing center administrators should pay more attention to how they communicate their services to SLWs. Writing centers' marketing materials may implicitly their services incorporate SLWs, but it should be made explicit exactly how SLWs can take advantage of the writing center.

The results of this study also demonstrate that writing centers need to be more strategic in their training for tutors, devoting more time to specific questions that should be asked in the opening stages of sessions, especially sessions with SLWs. Training should also incorporate strategies for wait time and demonstrating patience, for all writers but especially for SLWs. Tutors should use the perceived needs of the writer and their level of comfort and fluency writing in English, gathered in the opening stage, to determine which scaffolding technique will be most effective in meeting the needs of these writers. Additionally, monolingual tutors should also be especially aware of how their sympathy and empathy may not function as intended when used in sessions with SLWs. Ultimately, tutors should be aware of how their techniques are received by writers and do their best to ensure that all writers are comfortable and that their needs are met.

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Appendix

Table 1. Characteristics of Sessions with Chinese International Writers

Interview Number	**Pseudonym**	**Standing**	**Major**	**First or Return Visit**	**Self-Reported Level of Fluency**	**Writing Concern**	**Reported Technique Preference**
1	Jian	Senior	Business	First	High	Personal statement - grammar, wording, coherence	Cognitive Scaffolding
2	Chaunli	Senior	Psychology	First	High	Statement of purpose - grammar	Cognitive Scaffolding
3	Hong	Senior	Mechanical Engineering	Return	High	Personal statement - grammar and reader comprehension	Cognitive Scaffolding
4	Chang	Senior	Mathematics	Return	High	Personal statement - grammar and structure	Cognitive Scaffolding
5	Mei	Senior	Accountancy	Return	Average	Personal Statement - Structure and reader comprehension	Patience
6	Bao	Freshman	Computer Science and Statistics	First	Average	Intro-level philosophy paper - grammar and logic of argument	Cognitive Scaffolding

7	Chen	Freshman	Business Unassigned	Return	Average	Intro-level media and cinema studies paper - grammar and reader comprehension	Cognitive Scaffolding
8	Suyin	Freshman	Food Science and Human Nutrition	First	Low	ESL introductory rhetoric course paper - grammar and clarity	Praise
9	Zhang	Freshman	Agriculture and Consumer Economics	First	Low	ESL introductory rhetoric course - argument improvement and coherence	Praise
10	Lin	Junior	Integrative Biology	First	Low	Mid-level integrative biology paper - to discuss TA's comments and the structure of the paper	Patience